

What is the DOL protocol?

The DOL protocol is an independent, government-supported Halal-assurance scheme. It allows participating abattoirs to validate that the small ruminants they handle are alive at the point of slaughter by showing the ruminants can be revived from electrical head-only stun that is administered before slaughter.

The DOL protocol provides assurance to domestic and international Muslim consumers and customers that the slaughter is aligned with their beliefs. Research in 2017 indicated that the majority of Muslim scholars would accept stunning if it could be shown that the animals are alive at the point of slaughter. Indeed globally, similar assurance schemes exist to great effect, most prominently in New Zealand, facilitating access of stunned Halal sheep meat to 180 markets across the world.

The DOL protocol gives an opportunity for greater assurance in the Halal sector and working with the major Halal certification bodies widens acceptability of stunned Halal and expand access to international Halal markets which are seeing 50% increase year-on-year.

When did this happen?

Ministers and DEFRA launched the protocol on 22 April 2021. The three-year process has involved many representatives across the food and farming sector including: Lord Trees, NFU, AHDB, University of Bristol, British Veterinary Association, independent experts and the major Halal certification bodies – Halal Food Authority, Halal Monitoring Committee, Halal Consultations and Halal Certification Organisation. The group has worked together with DEFRA, FSA and their advisors to establish the DOL protocol within existing legal framework.

How does this fit within existing welfare at slaughter legislation?

The DOL protocol has a very specific application, limited to a small number of animals in a controlled and pre-planned demonstration. Senior FSA Field Veterinary Leads directly supervise the demonstrations and the abattoir Animal Welfare Officers (AWO) attend, whose legal mandate it is to protect welfare.

Crucially, the animals are not allowed to fully recover, but are allowed only to show the earliest signs of recoverability, before being immediately re-stunned and slaughtered. For these reasons, the protocol is considered to sit within the spirit of the legislation, under strict control and with minimal potential for welfare compromise.

Key points of the protocol

- Small ruminants only (sheep and goats)
- Maximum of two demonstrations per year
- Maximum of two animals (either species) per demonstration
- Signs of recoverability must show rhythmic breathing, with or without detectable heartbeat
- Maximum of two rhythmic breaths observed before re-stun and slaughter
- Protocol halted as unsuccessful after 60 seconds observation without signs
- Prior training, planning and FSA approval required before demonstration can be arranged
- The FSA does not charge a fee for the supervision of the demonstration
- Protocol must be attended by the FSA, AWO and Halal certification body representative but can also be observed by others at the discretion of the participating abattoir

Who can I contact?

AHDB is the industry first point of contact for the protocol. For further information, please contact awal.fuseini@ahdb.org.uk

How do I apply?

You can download a copy of the application form by visiting ahdb.org.uk/halal

The form contains details of the pre-requisites of the assurance scheme.